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**BULLETIN OF
NATIONAL LEAGUE ON
URBAN CONDITIONS
AMONG NEGROES**

(Incorporated 1913)



**A STUDY OF
NEGRO EMPLOYEES OF APARTMENT HOUSES
IN NEW YORK CITY.**

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"NOT ALMS BUT OPPORTUNITY."

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NATIONAL LEAGUE ON URBAN CONDITIONS AMONG NEGROES

Headquarters: 2303 Seventh Avenue, New York

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PREFACE.

The general labor unrest of today is attracting the public's attention as it has in no recent period of labor disturbances. The problem of satisfying labor's demands and keeping workmen happy and contented has appeared in nearly every occupation.

This problem has always been before the large majority of apartment house owners and agents. Especially have persons handling such labor among the colored people been perplexed at the numerous complaints; on the one hand by the employees as to hours of labor, wages, and the conditions under which the men live; and on the other hand by tenants as to the frequency with which employees are changed, the apparently lower intelligence of apartment house employees, or the indifference with which they operate elevators or switchboards and perform the other simple duties of their positions.

According to the occupational statistics of the 1910 Census, the apartment house employees constitute the third largest group of Negro wage-earners in New York City. Moreover, it is undoubtedly true that a large per cent. of the Negro males gainfully employed have been engaged, at some time or other, in apartment house employment.

This investigation of the Negro apartment house employee has been undertaken to discover the disturbing elements in this important occupation—this with the hope that some remedial measures may suggest themselves.



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A STUDY OF NEGRO EMPLOYEES OF APARTMENT HOUSES IN NEW YORK CITY.

I. Apartment-House Employment and the Negro.

Apartment-house employment is one of the chief occupations of Negroes in New York. The third largest number of Negroes gainfully employed in this city, according to the statistics of the Census of 1910, are those listed as "elevator-tenders." Investigation has revealed that about 95% of the latter are engaged in apartment-house employment. It has also revealed that they constitute about 80% of all colored employees of apartment-houses. The largest number of Negro males was listed as "servants," of whom there were 4,161 or 12.5% out of a total of 33,110 Negro males gainfully employed. The second largest number was listed as "porters (except in stores)" of whom there were 3,912 or 11.8%.

The titles "servants" and "porters (except in stores)" represent very broad classifications. They undoubtedly include many occupations in which the nature of the work, the conditions of labor and the wages paid are quite dissimilar. For instance, under "porter (except in stores)" may be understood, on the one hand, the porters employed by the subway and elevated transportation companies, whose functions are chiefly the sweeping and scrubbing of the stations of those companies and whose wages are low; and on the other hand, the Pullman porters whose work and hours are entirely different and whose actual income is very much higher. Considering these facts, it is very probable, if finer classifications had been made of those employees listed as "servants" and "porters (except in stores)," that "elevator-tenders" would stand second, if not first, on the list in numerical importance.

At present apartment-house employment is an occupation of unreasonably long hours and low pay with practically

little opportunity for advancement. This explains why 9% of Negroes gainfully employed are engaged in this occupation and only two-tenths of 1% of the whites. It is only such undesirable occupations as this that the Negro finds open to him to any extent. The white man accepts them only as a last resort.

A study of where the Negro enters apartment-house service shows that about 98% enter as elevator men, switch-board men or firemen. Less than 2% have been able to obtain the very much more desirable position of superintendent, and these few are located in the smallest and least remunerative houses. At the present time practically all of the superintendents are white, mostly Swedes and Germans, some English, and a very few Irish. They receive generally from \$75.00 to \$125.00 per month and a free apartment.

II. Scope of the Investigation.

For several reasons the investigation has been confined to employees of apartment-houses in the Borough of Manhattan. First of all, because 2,654 or 87% of such Negro employees work in houses located in Manhattan. Secondly, because practically all of them live in Manhattan. Furthermore, Manhattan contains by far the largest proportion of apartment-houses in New York City. Every type of house, from the smallest elevator apartment with a one-man force, to the enormous establishments on Riverside Drive, with their large staffs of elevator tenders, switch-board men, and door-men, is found in Manhattan.

Without doubt conditions among the colored men employed in Manhattan would be typical of those peculiar to the industry as a whole in New York City.

It would have been impossible in any reasonable period of time to have studied thoroughly the whole 2,654 men employed in Manhattan. Therefore, it was decided, after a preliminary survey of the whole field, to make the investiga-

tion an intensive rather than an extensive one. One hundred men seemed to present a fair group to make the basis of a representative investigation.

In order to avoid the personal equation in selecting the one hundred men for this study, the investigator made a preliminary survey of two hundred houses employing colored men in the different sections of Manhattan. Of these houses, twenty-five were then selected as representing not only every type of apartment-house but all the various apartment-house districts of Manhattan. The actual number of colored employees totalled 103, but the reports on one man in each of the last three houses were eliminated in order to make an even 100. This elimination made no practical difference in the statistics as in the case of each of the three men his wages and working conditions were identical with those of the other men in the house.

The division of labor among the colored men in the 25 houses was as follows:

- 2 superintendents.
- 4 firemen.
- 6 switch-board men.
- 8 door-men.
- 14 elevator-men.
- 66 switch-board and elevator-men.

100 Total.

The above distribution approximates very closely the percentage distribution of occupations among colored employees of apartment-houses throughout the industry as a whole in New York City.

Schedules* were prepared and presented to these 100 men. The schedules attempted to cover every phase of their work and home experiences. They were placed in the hands of the men by the investigator himself and filled out in his presence. In this way misunderstanding of questions was

* See appendix.

avoided and much supplementary information was obtained. Additional information was also obtained by personal visits to the homes.

About 150 special schedules for superintendents were distributed, some through the mail, but in the most part, personally. Of these, 50 were filled out. These schedules related chiefly to preference of the superintendent for colored or white labor; and among Negro superintendents, to preference for West Indian or American Negro labor. They also sought the superintendents' opinion as to the reliability, industry, etc., of the colored workmen. Finally, in the case of the superintendents of the selected group of 25 houses, they were used to check up the information given by the men.

A questionnaire* with explanatory letter was sent to 200 agents and owners who were known to employ some colored help. The information sought in these questionnaires, 20 of which were filled out, was very similar to that requested of the superintendents. The purpose was largely to ascertain the attitude of agents and owners toward their colored employees and to obtain if possible any hopeful constructive suggestions.

III. The Negro Employee of Apartment-Houses

Of the 100 men studied, 58 were West Indians and 42 Americans. This proportion seems to be true of the occupations as a whole. Several reasons have been given for this. The American Negroes say the West Indians will work for less money and longer hours. The West Indians are more popular with the superintendents than their American co-workers. This work because it is in-doors and easy, appeals to many West Indians who, of course, are accustomed to a tropical climate and many of whom are not used to

* For samples of schedules and questionnaires, see appendix.

hard manual labor. Out of 50 superintendents from whom information was obtained, 29 stated that they preferred West Indians: 21 stated that they had no preference; none expressed a preference for the Americans. The general consensus of opinion of the superintendents who preferred West Indians is expressed in the words of one, who said:

"I prefer the West Indian. He is more dependable. While he 'talks back,' nevertheless he doesn't get 'sore' and leave the job. The American Negro, on the other hand, if reprimanded, does not flare-up like the West Indian, but becomes sullen and the next day leaves the job."

There is undoubtedly truth in both what the American Negro and what the majority of superintendents state concerning the West Indian. However, there is another factor, which is often over-looked and which has had considerable effect in causing West Indian Negroes to appear in large numbers not only in apartment-house employment but in other occupations. It is their practice of a sort of co-operation that does not exist among American Negro employees. A West Indian elevator-man or door-man is ever on the alert to place some countryman with him in the same house. He apprises the superintendent of the good qualities of his friend and seeks a position for him. Very frequently three West Indians room together and when one or two are out of work the remaining members will support the little group until all are employed again. In the meantime the working members strain every effort to obtain positions for their comrades.

The average age was found to be twenty-six years. There were several men whose ages ranged from thirty-five to forty-five years and one switch-board man gave his age as fifty. The ages of the great majority of the men, however, lay between 21 and 28 years. This is probably due to the fact that as the men approached 30 years of age a large number married and, sooner or later, found it impossible to support a

family on their small wages, even with the assistance of their wives' earnings.

The majority of the men had received the equivalent of an elementary education. In other words, they had left school when they were from 13 to 15 years of age. The West Indian influence is seen here. Most of the West Indians, because of rigid enforcement of educational requirements in the Islands, have had an excellent common school education. The Americans of northern birth had spent about as many years in school as the West Indians—but the southern Negroes were far behind with from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 years as the usual amount of schooling. One notable exception among the Negroes of southern birth was a man who claimed that he had been graduated from a prominent colored university as a preacher.

Of the 100 men, 26 had learned a trade before they went into this work. Of this 26 there were 19 West Indians. The trades varied widely—from shoe-making to house-painting and from printing to carpentry. The universal claim seems to be that "the colored man hasn't a chance in New York in the trades." The shoe-maker who had learned his trade in St. Kitts claimed that "cobbling didn't pay much." A former chauffeur, one of the few Americans who could boast of a trade, claimed that "business was slow in chauffeuring."

On the whole, the group seemed ambitious, as 84 expressed a desire to get out of their present employment. This desire was being put into practice by 25 who pursued studies outside of hours. Of these, 5 attended the night classes at Public School No. 47 on 46th Street; 4 were studying chauffeuring; 2 were studying to be moving-picture operators; 4 were professional musicians; 4 were preparing for Civil Service examinations; 1 was learning plumbing, and one big door-man was preparing himself for the police examination.

It is likely very many more would be attending outside

study classes if their hours of labor would permit; but the weekly change of shifts prevents, in most cases, any attendance at regular classes. In addition, the long hours of these men are, in themselves, not conducive to extra work and mental exertion. But, that there is some ambition, some desire, deep down in their hearts, to better themselves, is articulated in the statement of the 84 that they "do not intend to stay in the business" and in the ambition of the 25 who are making courageous efforts against great odds to master a trade.

The average Negro apartment-house employee stays in one position from ten months to one and one-half years. This does not always depend on the men themselves. A fair and kindly superintendent will increase the length of time men are employed. In one house six men were found who had been working for the same superintendent from six to fifteen years. They had been with him in two houses.

In all too many instance of complaints by tenants the superintendent plays the cowardly part and without even inquiring into the merits of the case will reprimand the employee or discharge him. The superintendent has nothing to lose by humiliating the employee or discharging him, but it is a much more serious matter to incur the displeasure of a tenant. However, the just superintendent will attempt, if possible, to adjust the difficulties between tenant and employee.

One superintendent admitted that some superintendents had a direct inducement to discharge men. He said that certain employment agencies paid these superintendents a commission for every man hired through that agency. The latter received this commission back in the exorbitant fees they charged the men.

On the other hand, certain superintendents boasted to the investigation that the only time a man left them was when they got him a better job. The testimony of the men in these latter instances verified the superintendents' statement.

The superintendent was said to be fair by 58 men and unfair by 40.

The extra work required of the men in certain houses, such as mopping up the hallways in the morning, makes the period of employment of men in those houses much shorter.

There is one cause of leaving for which the men themselves are alone responsible. This is the changing of jobs to avoid collectors for installment houses. This evil is more common among the Americans than among the West Indians because the former indulge in more pleasures than the latter and hence are more often in debt and unable to pay their bills.

Ten months to one and one-half years, however, is quite typical of the colored employee's stay on the job.

Of the men studied, 69 were at the time of the investigation, or had at some time, been members of some church. Of the 69, the largest number were Episcopalians. Here we see the West Indian influence again. The remainder were divided between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist faiths.

Only five out of the 100 men were lodge members. Four of these were Odd-Fellows and one was a Knight of Pythias. This fact is worthy of comment since the Negro has the reputation for joining not only one, but several fraternal organizations. The only explanation of the extremely small proportion of colored employees of apartment-houses who were lodge members is that their wages, in this case, are too small to permit of their paying the necessary dues.

The opinions of the agents and owners as to the services of colored employees were sought and probably can be most logically stated at this juncture, in concluding the discussion of the characteristics of the colored employee of apartment-houses.

Out of 20 agents and owners, 15 had no criticism to make of the services of Negro employees. Of the 5 remaining agents, 3 found them excellent help "if carefully selected," and two

had the following unfavorable criticisms to make: "Unambitious and lazy"; "careless, no interest in their work, and absolutely devoid of truthfulness or any semblance or wish to make themselves useful."

It must be remembered, however, that the agents and owners only come in contact with their colored employees occasionally and have little first-hand knowledge of them.

The opinions of the superintendents should be of greater value since they have daily supervision of the employees. Out of 50 superintendents interviewed, 39 had no unfavorable criticism to make of colored employees and 11 stated they preferred colored to white employees. Four of the 11 gave the following reasons for preferring colored help:

1. "Received better service from colored boys."
2. "Preferred colored help for their diplomacy, and for their handling of children and old people."
3. "Took orders with less grumbling than white boys."
4. "Less interference with maids and other female help by colored boys."

One superintendent explained the situation thus: "The white boys are mostly the riff-raff. We can't keep a decent white fellow when we get one. If we have a likely-looking white boy on the elevator some tenant will ask him what he is working at a cheap job like that for. When the boy tells him that he was out of work and took the first thing that was offered him, the tenant will put himself out to find the likely-looking white boy a job. Usually he gives the boy a note of introduction to some business acquaintance. This wouldn't happen once in a dozen years to one of my colored men. Consequently we can keep our decent colored boys."

IV. Condition of Employment.

Apartment-house employment divides itself into seven classes, namely: the superintendent, the engineer, the fireman,

the porter, the door-man, the switch-board man, and the elevator man.

The superintendent's duties are largely those of a renting agent and custodian of the property. He is supposed to keep the entire plant in good running order. In small houses he frequently makes the necessary repairs himself—in the larger houses he merely directs the work of hired carpenters, painters, and the like. Of course, no small part of his duties is the supervision of the other employees of the house. The supreme test of a superintendent, as one agent put it, is to "keep the tenants quiet." Tenants are continually making complaints to agents regarding the need of repairs, poor service on the part of employees, insufficient heat, and innumerable other real and imaginary grievances. The superintendent who reduces these complaints to a minimum, no matter how he does it, is considered successful by the agents.

The duties of the apartment-house engineer differ little from those of the engineer of any other type of building. While there may be a few colored apartment house engineers, the investigator found none in his survey of 200 houses.

The principal duties of the door-man are to escort the tenant or visitor from the house to the edge of the sidewalk, open the door of the waiting carriage or automobile and help the tenant or visitor in.

The ordinary duties of the elevator-man are almost too obvious to require detailed explanation here. In many houses especially in the smaller apartment-houses, the elevator-men are required to sweep, dust, and mop out the lower halls in the morning.

The Negro fireman's duties are like those of any other fireman except that the hours of labor are much longer.

Only a few houses employ a porter.

It is rarely that there is any clear-cut division of labor between the elevator-men and the switch-board men. The men

usually alternate between the two tasks. In only six cases out of the 100 were switch-board operators found who did not at some time during the day operate the elevator and only in 14 cases were employees found who performed no other duties than those of elevator-tending.

The elevator and switch-board men constitute the great bulk of colored employees of apartment-houses. Consequently conditions under which they work and live are most representative of the group as a whole and will be given the more generous treatment here. It is true, however, that salaries and length of hours of labor of the different classes of apartment-house employees are about the same. As might be expected from these facts their home conditions vary but little.

The average number of hours per week at which the average colored employee of apartment-houses works is 77 hours. The largest proportion of the men work 84 hours per week. The shorter hours of some of the door-men and a few of the older men who work only on the switch-board bring the average down to 77. The typical week, however, is that of the 84 hour men. They do not actually work 84 hours in any one week, but in two weeks they work 168 hours. While on their short week they work only 10 hours a day, on their long week they work 14 hours a day. They work 7 days in the week with no holidays. Thus they alternate between a week of 70 hours and a week of 98 hours.

Certain superintendents claimed that their men were given a half-holiday on Sundays. On investigation it was found that they simply referred to a practice which is customary in most of the houses whereby an employee gets 10 extra hours on Sunday, providing he and the man on the opposite shift work 10 hours overtime between them. The thing is accomplished in this way. The man who comes on at five o'clock Saturday evening and is due to finish at eight o'clock Sunday morning works through until noon Sunday, four hours overtime. The relief man who, ordinarily, would

begin work at six o'clock Sunday evening, comes on at twelve noon, six hours earlier. The latter then works from noon Sunday until eight o'clock Monday morning, twenty hours straight, in order to give his partner a half day off. Hence we have one man working a stretch of eighteen hours in order to give one of them a chance to enjoy a breathing spell.

The superintendents under normal conditions have no difficulty in obtaining men. The usual source of supply is from boys recommended by the employees on the job. Out of the 50 superintendents to whom schedules were presented, 33 reported that their source was boys recommended by other boys; 9 obtained their boys from the agents or owners of the houses; only 7 were forced to apply for help from the commercial employment agencies, and one made a practice of sending to the Colored Men's Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, when he needed help.

There is, therefore, no system in the hiring of the men. It is only by the organization of the sources of helping that any standards can be imposed upon the men hired.

V. Wages.

The average pay of elevator and switch-board men was \$27.50 per month. The average pay of door-men was \$32.50. There were 90 of the elevator and switch-board men and only 8 door-men.

It was stated by all the men and admitted by most superintendents that tips were not near as high as they had been in the past. The statistics show that the average amount of tips received by the 100 men was \$3.00 per month. Adding this to the \$28.00 average wage, makes \$31.00 per month, the total income of the average colored employee. The income for a week of seven days is \$7.00. Thus the typical wage for one of the largest groups of colored working men is two dollars a week less than the minimum wage of \$9.00 advocated

for women in New York City by the N. Y. State Factory Investigating Committee.

The investigator found that white men in the same neighborhood received more money than the colored men. Twelve out of the 100 colored employees reported that the white men, in the neighborhood received \$15.00 more wages per month, 45 reported that the white boys receive \$10.00 more, 27 reported that the white boys received \$5.00 more, 10 reported that the white boys received \$2.50 more, and 6 reported that they received the same. Interviews with the superintendents practically confirmed these statements.

Cases were cited to the investigator where the working force had been changed from white to colored and back again. In these cases the wages were raised when the white men were taken on but reduced when colored men were re-employed. When two large department stores failed, for instance, the proprietors used their influence with real estate owners and agents to have colored elevator and switch-board men superseded by the white store employees thrown out of work. There were several houses in the vicinity of West 84th Street where the former dry-goods clerks took the place of colored employees. In each of these houses the wages were raised from the \$30.00, which the colored men had been receiving, to \$40.00. When, after a short while, the ex-store help was found unsatisfactory and the colored men were called back to their former posts, the wages were reduced to the original wage of \$30.00.

Practically every man interviewed complained of the inadequacy of the wages to meet even the mere necessities of life. Of the 100 interviewed, 76 would prefer higher wages without tips; 21 would prefer the present wages with more tips. The objections to tips and the present wages seemed to be that tips were irregular and were gradually diminishing, whereas higher wages were dependable. One point was that adequate wages would insure every man a livelihood whereas tips would not because some men lacked the ability

to get tips from tenants. Some men objected to tips because they were "humiliating." Others stated that "people expected too much for tips" and that "tips saddle men down with an enormous number of odd jobs."

There have been increases in wages in only 24 cases out of the 100 investigated. The average increase was \$5.00.

There was usually only one raise and the men worked, on the average, two years before they obtained it.

VI. Living Conditions.

Of the 100 men investigated, 65 were single and 35 were married. The single men pay, on the average, \$1.50 per week for room rent. This is about 22% of their total income for the week, an unusually large proportion. But the high rent charged Negroes in Harlem compels those who keep lodgers to charge a proportionately high sum for lodging. The majority of rooms occupied by apartment-house employees rent for \$2.00 to \$2.50 per week. The custom of putting two and frequently three in a room reduces the per capita charge—but it is never reduced proportionately. That is, if a room rents for \$2.00 per week for one person, instead of being rented at \$1.00 a piece for two, \$1.25 or \$1.50 is charged each lodger.

These rooms are, more often than not, dark rooms in the middle of the so-called railroad tenements and receive only the most imperfect ventilation and no sunlight.

The average apartment-house employee has a car fare expense of 70c. weekly and a laundry charge of 30c.

If we leave out replacement of clothing, amusements, newspapers, and expenditures for all other purposes, we have \$3.50 a week left to some of the men for meals. To any one well acquainted with New York, it is evident that one cannot buy a great deal of food on an outlay of 50c. a day. But even this is giving food a greater due than it really receives. It is too much to expect that the men will deny

themselves of everything but lodgings and food. They must have clothing. The only place where they can skimp being on their food—they do it and menace their health in doing so.

There are several cheap restaurants in the colored district of Harlem where two rolls, some so-called butter, and a cup of miserable coffee can be obtained for a nickel. This is the breakfast of many of the Negro employees of apartment-houses. Some do indulge themselves to the extent of spending a dime and have griddle-cakes and coffee or perhaps some wretched pork and beans. They rarely spend more than ten cents, however, as the most rigid economy has to be practiced. Lunch usually costs the Negro elevator-man 15c., and the menu is neither more nourishing nor more attractive than the breakfast.

These boys can rarely get money enough together to buy a suit of clothes outright and hence the installment firm is, at once, their salvation and their ruin. Few, if any, of the younger men are not paying at least a dollar a week to installment houses. The suits which the employees obtain in this way are much better than they would have bought if they were able to pay cash and yet they are not worth two-thirds as much as the men are charged for them. These facts may account for some of the "showiness" of dress for which several agents criticized the men. Installment firms do not deal in cheap priced clothes.

The wives of 22 of the 35 married men worked away from home. Of these 22 married women who worked, 19 had children. The wives of 16 did day's work and 6 were maids. The average weekly earnings of these women were \$7.00. When it is considered that 19 out of the 22 had children it is obvious that the extra income was absolutely necessary to the family. There were lodgers in 14 of the 35 families of married employees. The necessity for this is apparent when it is considered that the average rent paid was \$18.00 per month. The average number of rooms was four.

Tuberculosis is prevalent among the Negroes of New York. According to the latest report of the New York Department of Health, the death rate for Negroes was almost twice as high as that for whites in this city. The conditions under which Negro apartment-house employees are forced to live partially account for this disproportionate record. Tenants of apartment-houses fail to realize that they come in close daily contact with sufferers from various diseases due to the small over-crowded, badly-lighted and ventilated rooms in which these boys must live. The flats in which they find the cheapest rooms are always cold water flats and bathing facilities are inadequate.

It has been shown already in the chapter on wages that the average pay, including tips, was about \$31.00 per month. This amounts to \$1 a day—for a day, which every other week is fourteen hours long—one dollar a day for a man to feed himself, clothe himself, pay rent, provide for sickness and death and obtain the minimum of amusement, a premium thereby being placed on health and honesty.

VII. Social Life and Leisure Time.

The leisure time of the colored apartment-house employee is, usually, either of two extremes. It is a monotonous, drab, uneventful existence or an extremely morbid and vicious one. Long hours of labor are conducive to a sort of stupefaction which finds relief, either in sleep or in over-excitement.

On the whole the American goes in for the more violent and morbid pleasures. Of course there are West Indians who indulge in vicious amusements also, but, as a rule, the influence of the simple life of their former island homes is still upon them, and their chief pleasures are a little walking or some innocent card playing in the homes of West Indian friends and then early to bed.

Neither West Indian nor American attended the theatre very much. The average expenditures for this form of en-

tainment was 25c. per month. The theatre, after all, is expensive. The Negro employee can sit around a pool room free-of-charge. If he is a good pool player he can play all the evening for nothing because the loser pays the bills. This practice is an easy step to gambling. The apartment-house employee sees in gambling the only chance of ever getting together any considerable sum of money. The investigator has been frequently told by the men that they have so many demands upon their slender wages that they never know what it is to have as much as four or five dollars in their pocket two or three days after pay day.

The better class of dances which charge a half dollar or thirty-five cents are precluded to the Negro employee of apartment-houses. He goes to the cheap weekly class where he can dance for fifteen cents, and where he is brought in contact with the most dissolute characters. He goes also to the rathskellar underneath many of the saloons where by buying a nickel glass of beer he can see dancing and hear music for nothing.

VIII Previous Attempt at Relief.

The only previous attempt at relief has been through organization of the men and through a former investigation. The attempt to organize the men referred to here took place in 1914. There is considerable doubt as to the sincerity of the person responsible for the inauguration of the idea. The movement was started by a self-appointed walking delegate, a white man of whose credentials no one had any reliable information. He was, however, a good talker and did arouse considerable enthusiasm among the men. He urged them to unite in a permanent association in order to strive for better working conditions and better pay. He was successful in forming a definite organization and in having himself appointed treasurer. After having collected a one dollar initiation fee from a large number of men he decamped with the funds. This was a disheartening blow to the men and

especially to the other officers of the association who were sincerely hoping to better themselves and their comrades. It put a dampener on any attempt to organize the men for some time—and, since many of the men who were swindled at that time are still in apartment house employment, it has made it difficult to obtain even the information sought in the present investigation.

Several former investigations of Negro employees of apartment-houses have been conducted, and in every case but one no hopeful suggestion for improvement is offered. One investigator, Dr. E. E. Pratt, proposes a solution—the employment of none but old men. He argues that the wages paid in apartment-house employment would be as high as men of their age could obtain elsewhere, that their employment would help to solve the problem of the dependent old man; and that their living expenses, in the last analysis, would be less than those of young men. This was a very valuable idea theoretically, but practically it does not work out. Tenants object to the services of old men on the grounds that they are too slow, and that the cars are unsafe in their hands. In addition, many “prefer to see young men on the cars.”

IX. Present Attempts at Relief.

There is at the present time, an organization of colored employees of apartment-houses. It is little more than a year old. It grew out of the efforts of the Industrial Secretary of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, who has been endeavoring to organize the Negro in those occupations where there are large numbers of colored men employed. As has been stated before, the experience of the men with the association of 1914 has made organization difficult. Yet, in a way, this new society is developing in the best and most logical manner. It is being formed slowly and by the most trustworthy, most optimistic, and most courageous men. While the ultimate object is complete unionization of

the entire industry, yet for the time being the men are being carefully selected. The investigator does not believe that organization is the whole solution of the problem, yet he believes it is a necessary factor, and accordingly has in his visits to apartment-houses persuaded desirable men to join this new association of colored employees of apartment-houses.

It must be said in passing that the present organization has been very fortunate in obtaining the moral support and co-operation of the Superintendents' and Janitors' Association. Since the superintendent is the mediator between the colored employee and the agent or owner, in nine times out of ten, the encouragement of the Superintendents' and Janitors' Association is an advantage which should not be underrated.

There have been several isolated attempts to benefit a specific group of employees. The writer will only mention one experiment here because as a rule such schemes have no effect on the industry as a whole.

Mr. H—, superintendent of a large apartment-house, at — West End Avenue, has formed the tenants into a club. The purpose of this club is to better the conditions and improve the efficiency of the colored employees. The club has a president, secretary and treasurer. Every member must contribute at least \$25.00 to the treasury at the beginning of every year. This money is to be divided equally among the colored employees in monthly installments throughout the year. Meetings of this tenants' club are held monthly, and the conduct and efficiency of the various employees are discussed. If any serious infractions of duty are committed by any of the employees, the guilty man is fined—not from his regular salary, but from his monthly allotment. The scheme originated with this superintendent who felt that his men were not getting salary enough to enable them to live decently. As might be expected, the men in this house have been in his employ a long time. One elevator man has been

there fifteen years; another twelve; and the average of the six employees is nine years, which is about eight years longer than the average colored employee "stays on the job." Furthermore, the men of this house are of a more mature type and of a better personality than the average.

One well-known owner has been conspicuous for his efforts to benefit his men. He has the reputation of paying \$10.00 per month more to his help than any other owner or agent in the city. In addition, he has carried on for a number of years a free vocational school for his employees. These classes are also available to employees of other agents. Here the elevator and switchboard men are taught the essentials of apartment-house plumbing, heating, repair work, etc., and are thus made more useful and are better able to present a claim for better salaries.

In the investigator's opinion, this owner has come nearer a solution of the problem than any one else. He writes: "To explain the difficulties of the individual owner under present general conditions, I may state that in quite a number of cases, where we have sold buildings, our elevator men have been forced by the new owner either to reduce their wages or be discharged. This seems to me to prove that the individual isolated owner cannot do very much to raise wages unless at the same time, by methods of education, he makes the men able to earn more. Of course a minimum wage law, a law regulating the hours of work, a union or any other method, which would affect everybody equally, would do infinitely more in a week than any individual owner could do in several life times."

X. Some Suggestions.

Complete unionization is a useful factor in the improving of working conditions in any occupation. Thirty out of fifty superintendents believe it would benefit the colored employees to organize. The employees are, at present, abso-

lutely helpless in the hands of the apartment-house agents so far as improvements in the matter of wages, length of hours, and other working conditions are concerned. Whenever an agent feels that a house is not yielding a large enough financial return, it is much easier for him to lower the wages of the colored employees than it is to raise the rent of the tenants. The tenant can fight back. He can always put the agent on the defensive by threatening to move. But the colored employee has not yet learned, or rather been permitted to learn, the value of collective bargaining between labor and capital. The agents can play one employee against the other. At present it would be useless for a group of employees to leave a house as a protest against reduced wages or anything else. The agents could fill the abandoned positions with new men immediately. Organization must come, however.

Legislation is the most obvious remedy for the long hours of colored apartment-house employees. Days that are 14 hours long are too much of an abuse to be subjected to dickering between employer and employee. In a society that is rapidly accepting the eight-hour day as a basis, the hours imposed upon the colored apartment-house employee seem particularly vicious and unpardonable. There is no reason why apartment-houses that supply continuous service cannot be run on three eight-hour shifts. There is a field here also for minimum wage legislation.

The licensing of elevator-men would be of some benefit to employees, agents, and tenants. It would be quite a forward step in improving the type of men in the industry. There is no way now to keep out the beggars, the crooks and the other undesirables who give a bad name to the men as a whole. When a representative of this bad element is discharged from one house, he simply changes his name and finds employment in another house. Licensing would afford an opportunity of checking up these undesirables. Exactly

half of the agents believed that it would help to have the men licensed.

The task of bettering the conditions of the colored employee of apartment-houses will not be finished when legislation or the voluntary action of the owners has given the men decent hours and an adequate minimum wage. A very serious drawback of the occupation still remains—namely, its “blind alley” quality. It leads no where. Most all the men have stated that the consciousness of this fact is a destroyer of ambition and hope. It is that which makes them restless and indifferent.

In the investigator’s opinion, there is a very simple way to make the job worth while, to dignify it and to keep the best type of men in the industry. This way consists in giving the Negro employees an opportunity to rise in the business.

At the present time practically all the superintendents are white. As has been stated before, they are paid very well, receiving from \$75.00 to \$125.00 per month plus their living apartments. Where colored superintendents have been tried out they have been found eminently satisfactory. It seems not only possible and practicable but good business policy to advance men from elevator service to assistant-superintendent or engineer and thus to superintendent.

Of course, along with this gradual promotion must go some such training as the progressive real estate man aforementioned has instituted. It is too much to ask that a man be transferred from elevator and switch-board service to assistant-superintendent with no training in the duties of the latter. However, such preparation can easily be obtained at certain night schools. It should be one of the functions of the apartment-house men’s organization to encourage attendance at such schools.

That this idea of training the elevator-man for the posi-

tion of superintendent is not a visionary scheme is attested to by the fact that one very successful owner has found it to work well in actual practice, and by the voluntary suggestions of several other agents that training of the colored employees would be the only means of obtaining for them better pay and better working conditions.

In concluding this brief glimpse into the lives of one of the largest groups of colored wage-earners in New York City, it must be admitted, we have looked upon a somewhat dull and depressing picture. We are now aware that the apparent happiness, the perpetual smile of the Negro elevator-man is not due to contentment with his position or satisfaction over a well-rounded life. It's a part of his job to smile. His existence is as bare, as sordid, as soul-quenching as that of the "Man with the Hoe." The only difference is that the peasant in that famous picture had forgotten how to smile.

Somebody is piling up an awful store of responsibility for the empty lives, the demoralized homes, the shattered lungs that lurk behind the smile of the Colored Apartment-House Employee.

APPENDIX.

EMPLOYEES' SCHEDULE

Name Home address
 How long in New York City?
 How long in present position?
 Business address Age Birth place
 How long in apartment-house employment?

Conditions of Labor.

Please draw a line through the one, or more than one, of the occupations on the line below, in which you are employed.

Superintendent. Ass't Supt. Engineer. Ass't Engineer.
 Number of hours per week Length of shifts
 Door-Man. Elevator-Man. Porter. Switchboard-Man.
 Days off per week Days off per month
 Does agent or superintendent hire and discharge?
 Do you consider the agent fair?
 Do you consider the Sup't. fair?
 What personal work for superintendent is expected of you?

 What free personal work for tenants is expected of you?

Wages.

What are your present wages?
 What increase in wages have you received in your present employment?
 Average amount of tips received per month
 For what services are tips received?
 Would you prefer higher wages without tips or present wages with tips? Why?
 How do your wages compare with those of white employees in neighboring houses?

Living Conditions.

Are you married, widowed or single?

If married, do you keep house?

What rent do you pay?.... How many rooms?... Bath?....

How many lodgers have you? Sex?

If married, is your wife employed?

What kind of work?

Does she receive work at home?

What are the weekly earnings of your wife?

If she does days' work, state number of days and wages per day?

How many children have you? State sex and age?

.....

Are your children employed?

What wages do they receive per week?

If lodger, how much do you pay for lodgings for self?

How many room-mates have you?

Do they pay same amount as you?

Will you fill out the following schedules of expenses with as great a degree of accuracy as possible?

Expenditure for	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly
Rent			
Food			
Fuel			
Clothing			

Expenditure for	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly
All other purposes			
Alcoholic Drinks			
Tobacco			
Amusements			

General Questions.

Of what church are you a member?

Of what lodge are you a member?

Is it a beneficiary organization?

In what company are you insured?

Of what social or athletic club are you a member?

Do you attend any study classes regularly?

Do you attend night school?

Have you a trade or profession?

What is it? Why have you not followed it?

In what other ways, not accounted for here, do you spend your leisure time?

Do you intend to remain at your present kind of employment? Why?

How many years have you spent in school?

What school and where?

Remarks:

Date

Superintendents' Schedule.

Name of House Address.....

Agent or Owner Address.....

Superintendent Address.....

Elevator or not Number of colored employees

Number of apartments

Hours per week of colored employees

Rent of apartments Length of shifts

Day off per week Per month

Are legal holidays recognized?

Occupations of Negro Employees : Wages

Superintendent:.....

Ass't Sup't. :.....

Engineer:.....

Ass't Engineer:.....

Fireman:.....

How many door-men? :.....

How many elevator-men? :.....

How many switchboard-men? ... :.....

How many porters?:.....

Other employees:.....

Are colored employees hired and discharged by owner,
agent or superintendent?

How long does the average colored employee keep his
job?

Do you have any difficulty in filling vacancies?

What is your source of supply?

Employment agency or otherwise

What criticism have you to make of the service of colored
employees?

Do American-born or West Indian Negroes give the better
service?

Do you think there is a problem of Negro employees of
apartment-houses?

What in brief is this problem?

If you have a solution for this problem please state it below

Remarks:

Date

Agents' or Owners' Schedule.

Name of agent

Business address

1. How many colored employees have you in the apartment-houses controlled by you?
2. How many white employees have you in the apartment-houses controlled by you?
3. In what capacity are colored men employed in your houses?
 - a. How many superintendents?
 - b. How many Ass't Sup'ts?
 - c. How many Engineers?
 - d. How many Ass't Engineers?
 - e. How many Firemen?
 - f. How many Door-men?
 - g. How many Elevator-men?
 - h. How many Porters?
 - i. How many Switch-board men?
4. a. If not now, have you ever employed colored help?
 b. Why and when did you dispense with them?
5. a. Has the number of colored employees, in apartment-houses controlled by you, increased or decreased during the past year? How much?
 b. During the past five years? How much?
6. What criticism have you to make of the services of colored employees of apartment-houses?
7. a. Do you think there is a problem of colored employees of apartment-houses?
 b. What in brief is this problem?
 c. If you have a solution for this problem, please state it below?
8. Do you think it would help to have elevator-men licensed?

Remarks:

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